

The birds you might see at the Morgan Arboretum

The Morgan Arboretum, a 245-ha preserve of woods and fields owned by McGill University, provides consistently good birding year round.

In summer, the Arboretum has one of the highest numbers of breeding species on the Island of Montreal. A dozen species of warblers or more nest here. In fall, the Arboretum is a good vantage point from which to view the hawk migration. In winter, the Arboretum attracts winter finches, crossbills, the occasional northern woodpecker and raptors such as the Northern Goshawk. Spring migrants, particularly warblers, are plentiful although they are more spread out and harder to find than in migrant traps like Summit Park.

The forest has been said to be one of the most diverse in southwestern Quebec in terms of tree species and is also the largest on the Island of Montreal. It hosts such forest-nesting species as Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, Scarlet Tanager, Pileated Woodpecker, Philadelphia Vireo and Ovenbird.

At least four species of owls Great Horned, Northern Saw-whet, Barred and Eastern Screech-Owl have breed here and Great Gray and Boreal Owls have been found here in winter. The extensive evergreen plantations attract species with a more boreal affinity.

Entrance and First Parking Lot

The fields to your left and right after you turn onto Chemin des Pins may contain Horned Larks, American Pipits and Snow Buntings in the right season. Check the tall trees for a perched Northern Shrike, Red-tailed Hawk or other raptor. A few years ago, a Red-headed Woodpecker spent part of the winter in the area around the farm pond on the

left. Cliff Swallows nest on the Doppler radar tower dome.

After you pass the Arboretum gatehouse, the field to your left after the first parking lot is a good place to see soaring Turkey Vultures, a Coopers or Sharp-shinned hawk flying through the tops of the trees, or perhaps a speeding Merlin or Peregrine Falcon.

Conservation Centre

The feeders, maintained in fall, winter and spring by Bird Protection Quebec, attract the usual feeder birds and occasionally a Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Evening Grosbeak or Rose-breasted Grosbeak can be spotted. Check out the conifers in winter for overwintering passerines such as American Robins or owls.

Centre Road (Orange Trail)

A variety of forest birds can be seen along the trail at all times of year. In summer, breeding forest birds include the Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green and Blackburnian warblers, Hermit and Wood thrushes, Brown Creeper, Veery, Ovenbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Pileated Woodpecker. Owls can sometimes be seen swooping through the woods or heard calling. The pond in the northwestern corner is a particularly good place for migrants in spring and fall.

Blossom Corner

When you take the Centre Road (Orange Trail) counterclockwise, this is the first clearing on the left. It has flowering fruit trees, gardens and some well-placed benches to watch the birds. Pine Grosbeaks and Bohemian Waxwings are attracted

to the numerous fruit trees in winter. White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos have overwintered in the cedars, thanks to the feeders nearby. In spring, check out the quarry pond for Wood Ducks. Also Eastern Screech-Owls have been found in this area. The woods between Blossom Corner and Chalet Pruche are excellent for migrating passerines.

Chalet Pruche and Larch Plantations

Continuing counterclockwise along the Centre Road, you will come to the larch plantations and Chalet Pruche, just behind. In spring, the tall larches along the Centre Road are often filled with a variety of migrating warblers. An Eastern Towhee has been spotted here, and Great Horned Owls have nested in the larches north of Chalet Pruche.

The edge habitat in the field east of Chalet Pruche is a reliable spot for breeding Indigo Buntings.

"Bobolink" and Alfalfa Fields

Further along the Main Road in the same direction is the Bobolink field, which has breeding Bobolinks in the summer.

The alfalfa field is just to the east of the Bobolink field. Water collects here in spring, which attracts ducks such as Mallard, Green-winged Teal, Wood Duck and the occasional yellowlegs or other shorebird. Savannah Sparrows breed here. It may also contain a perched Northern Goshawk, an overflying Common Raven or Common Nighthawk, or browsing White-tailed Deer.

Pullins Pasture

Pullins Pasture, an overgrown field with many fruiting shrubs and trees, has an interior trail (an extension of the Yellow Trail) that loops 2 km

around the field and two paths on either side extending from the Centre Road. Pullins Pasture can be reached by taking either one of these paths and then by cutting into the pasture itself.

Pullins Pasture is good for birding at all times of the year, but requires skis in the winter. In summer, breeding species include the House Wren (many pairs); Northern Cardinal; Alder Flycatcher; Yellow, Chestnut-sided and Black-and-white warblers, Common Yellowthroat, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Kingbird and Gray Catbird. Mourning Warblers have also nested here.

In the fall, the fruiting trees, shrubs and vines and weed seeds attract throngs of American Robins, Cedar Waxwings, migrating sparrows and other species, which in turn provide fodder for bird-eating hawks, including Merlins and Sharp-shinned and Coopers hawks. A particularly good vantage point is at the place where the Yellow Trail cuts into the middle of the Pasture and then loops around back to the edge.

Other species that have been seen here include Ruffed Grouse, Black-billed Cuckoo, Black-backed Woodpecker, Evening Grosbeak, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Bluebird, the various swallows and the American Woodcock.

Yellow Trail, Red Trail and Evergreen Plantations

In winter, the evergreen plantations, just south of the Centre Road and accessible by the Yellow Trail from the dog parking lot, are a good spot to search for Pine Grosbeaks, Bohemian Waxwings, Brown Creepers, crossbills and northern woodpeckers. Golden-crowned Kinglets, which breed in the plantations in summer, overwinter here regularly. Red-breasted Nuthatches do the same. Part of the plantations can also be accessed via the Red Trail.

The above text was written by Bird Protection Quebec member, Betsy McFarlane, who visits the Arboretum almost every day of the year to watch the birds.

If you are interested in birds and would like to know about the Bird Protection Quebec visit their web site at www.birdprotectionquebec.org